



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

IX.—THE NARCISSA EPISODE IN YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS

In what purports to be a definitive life of the poet Young, H. C. Shelley remarks that the question of the identity of Philander, Lucia, and Narcissa, raised by the peculiar chronology of their deaths, as recorded in the *Night Thoughts*, forms "the most puzzling problem of Young's biography." Part of the problem had already been solved by M. Walter Thomas,¹ to whom Sir Leslie Stephen refers at the close of his article on Young in the D. N. B., an article referred to by Mr. Shelley himself. M. Thomas shows pretty conclusively that Philander was no other than Thomas Tickell, the lifelong intimate friend of Young, whose death occurred suddenly at Bath on April 23, 1740.² Lucia was the poet's wife, the "poor Lady Betty Lee" of Mrs. Pendarves's letter, who was left "with three children to maintain and not a farthing to support her."³ The identity of Narcissa, however (which Mr. Shelley makes no attempt to solve), offers greater difficulty. Professor Thomas suggests that she may have been an illegitimate daughter "reconnue par le père, acceptée par sa femme, mais désavouée par le moraliste. Peut-être," he continues, "encore l'enfant est-elle née trop tôt, Young ayant anticipé en quelque sort sur les droits du mariage."⁴

Before examining this theory and the evidence upon which it is based, it may be well to review briefly what preceding writers have had to say about the matter. With

¹ *Le Poète Edward Young*, Paris, 1901.

² *Op. cit.*, chap. vi, pp. 147-9.

³ *Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Delaney*, vol. I, p. 253.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, chap. vi, p. 169.

only one exception (noted by Professor Thomas) the earliest editors and biographers of Young fix on Mrs. Henry Temple, the favorite step-daughter of the poet, as the original of Narcissa. Croft, for example, states that while some passages relating to Philander suit neither Mr. Temple nor any other person known to be connected with Young, "all the circumstances relating to Narcissa have been constantly applicable to Young's daughter-in-law" ⁵ (i. e., step-daughter), and in this view Dodsley, R. Anderson, Chalmers, the Rev. John Mitford, and Dr. Doran, as well as Continental critics like Le Tourneur, Ebert, and Villemain all concur.⁶ The single exception noted occurs in the *Biographia Britannica* for 1765, where the anonymous writer refers to Narcissa simply as the poet's daughter.

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century this theory received a severe blow. A correspondent of *Notes and Queries* (May 31, 1851) indignantly writes as follows:

A pamphlet was recently published at Lyons and Paris, by a Monsieur de Terrebasse, intending to prove that the daughter-in-law of Dr. Young, so pathetically lamented by him in the *Night Thoughts* under the poetical name of "Narcissa" was not clandestinely buried at Montpellier; that Dr. Young did not steal a grave for her from the Roman Catholics of that city; and that consequently the celebrated and touching episode in Night III is purely imaginary. This opinion of M. Terrebasse, first given to the world by him in 1832, and now repeated, has been controverted by the writer of an article in the *Gazette Médicale* of Montpellier. The tomb, it is said, of Elizabeth Lee, Dr. Young's daughter-in-law, was discovered a few years since at Lyons; and M. de Terrebasse endeavors to prove from that circumstance and from a comparison of facts and dates, that this Elizabeth Lee was the "Narcissa" of the poet. Not having seen M. de Terrebasse's pamphlet, and being indebted to the *Journal des Savants* for

⁵ Croft's *Life of Young*, in Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*.

⁶ *Le Poète Edward Young*, chap. vi, p. 150.

this brief account of it, it seems difficult to discover from it how M. de Terrebassee can pretend so summarily to invalidate the solemn assertions of the poet, which assuredly are anything but flights of fancy. . . .

A little later another writer attempts to reassure the above-cited correspondent with a summary of a letter written from Montpellier in 1789 by a Mr. Walter Taylor.⁷

It shows [viz., the letter referred to] that Mr. Taylor and others conversed with the gardener of the "King's Garden"; and from him (son of the former gardener) heard that about forty-five years before (namely, in 1744) Dr. Young had bribed the then under-gardener to allow him to bury "Narcissa"; and would thus prove that the tradition existed at that time at Montpellier.

There is also in a retired part of the Botanic Garden (established by Henry IV) a stone bearing an inscription to Narcissa as mentioned in Murray's *Handbook*, placed there probably in consequence of that tradition. Moreover, it is believed in the family of a gentleman of Montpellier, that his maternal grandfather saw Dr. Young and his step-daughter at Montpellier about the year 1741; that the lady died there, and was buried, as is stated, in the garden; that, however, it was not Mrs. Temple, but a younger sister of hers.

It appears from the records in this country that Lady Elizabeth Lee, by her first marriage, had one son and two daughters. The son was buried at St. Marys-le-Strand in 1743; the elder daughter married Henry Temple, son of Viscount Palmerston, and it appears died in France (perhaps at Lyons) in 1836; the younger, Caroline, married Captain, afterwards General Haviland, and died without issue. The General died at Penn, in Buckinghamshire, in 1784; but no record relating to his first wife, Miss Caroline Lee, is to be found there.

Such record, if found in any parish in England, would greatly tend to decide the question. Possibly some correspondent may be in a position to ascertain whether such record exists.

Lady Elizabeth had by her marriage with Dr. Young, a son only; it could not, therefore, be a daughter of Young's that died at Montpellier.

And there, at least so far as the readers of *Notes and Queries* were concerned, the matter rested until 1871. In

⁷ N. & Q., vol. v, p. 252 (March 13, 1852).

December of that year another writer communicates some new facts, the fruit of a sojourn in Montpellier in 1860:

Whilst looking through the shelves of the Bibliothèque Fabre [he says], I lighted on a thin quarto volume, half-bound in blue morocco, with the title *Tombeau de Narcissa*, which the librarian kindly allowed me to carry to my hotel. It contained seven pieces . . . [here follows a detailed description of them dated in the neighborhood of 1850; all have since been very carefully examined by M. Thomas].

Most of the writers of these brochures [continues the N. & Q. correspondent] declare the story of the burial of Narcissa to be a fiction. A young English girl, they state, having died at Montpellier in the eighteenth century, was buried in the Jardin des Plantes, where the monument now bearing the name of Narcissa has been placed. A writer in the *Journal des Arts*, under the signature "A," becoming acquainted with these facts, jumped to the conclusion that they referred to Young's step-daughter; the truth being that she died at Lyons on Oct. 8, 1736, and was interred in the Swiss cemetery there, where her monument can still be seen, and that Young had only one child by his marriage with Lady Elizabeth Lee, his son Frederick, who survived him.

M. Pierrequin de Gembloux, on the other hand, contends that the narrative of M. Artaud [author of the two brochures mentioned above] is true; that the poet's step-daughter, Mrs. Temple, who died at Lyons, was not Narcissa, but that he had two children by Lady Elizabeth—Narcissa, born in 1732, and Frederick, in 1733; that Narcissa died at Montpellier in 1749 and was buried first in a field belonging to M. Arribert, whence the body was removed and interred secretly in the Jardin des Plantes; which circumstances are publicly recorded in the *Statistiques du département de Hérault*, par M. H. de Lesser.

To this it was replied that the *Night Thoughts* were published in 1742-45 and could not refer to events in 1749, and that Young's biographers made no mention of his own daughter.

The narrative of Artaud is very circumstantial. He states that he obtained his information from Barral, the head gardener of the Jardin des Plantes, who had learned them from Mercier, an old gardener under him, who had assisted at the interment; M. Balanvilliers being then superintendent of the garden. At a subsequent period Lord and Lady Camelford caused the spot to be exhumed. The bones found were recognized by M. Vigaroux, of the school of anatomy, as those of a very young person. They were re-interred,

and the monument erected with the inscription: 'Placandis Narcissæ manibus.' M. Artaud had previously scratched on the adjoining wall: 'Inter flores Narcissa relucet.'

This account tallies with the statement 'written by Mr. Walter Taylor from Montpellier in 1789,' and there can be no reasonable ground for believing that both are substantially not true.

The writer then goes on to say that the sole evidence that Lady Elizabeth had only one child by Young is a statement by Croft "who wrote in 1780, and is by no means accurate in all his statements." He then assumes that in all probability Young did not go abroad until 1741, "a few months after his wife's death," and that the events connected with Narcissa's death at Montpellier took place then. "Narcissa must, therefore, be either Mrs. Haviland [Young's step-daughter, Caroline] or his own daughter, born in 1732." He dismisses the former alternative in favor of the latter, principally because there is no mention of General Haviland in the poem, and also because "the circumstances of the burial accord with that of a child of ten or eleven years."

The writer of the foregoing letter, it will be noted, eagerly adopts the view of M. Artaud, that Young had another child, a daughter, who was born in 1732. Unfortunately for this assumption, as Professor Thomas points out, the parish records of Welwyn show that the date of Frederick's birth falls in 1732,⁸ and not, as M. Artaud believed, in 1733, which is the date incorrectly given by Herbert Croft.

Up to this point, those French critics who dismiss the Montpellier tradition as a fabrication, and charge Young with insincerity or worse, have decidedly the better of the case. They entrench themselves behind the official records, which prove that Mrs. Temple—the Narcissa of

⁸ *Op. cit.*, chap. vi, p. 168.

practically all of Young's biographers—was buried in a regular and public manner. They were actuated no doubt by patriotic motives; they wished to vindicate the French nation from the charge of hard-heartedness and religious bigotry. The view set forth by Joseph Texte⁹ may be accepted as theirs. After remarking that if the charges were true they would be enough to "cover the French nation with confusion," he dismisses them as follows:

The gruesome story of the father burying his daughter in secret went the round of Europe; and a lugubrious engraving representing Young interring Narcissa by the light of a lantern was introduced as a frontispiece to the second volume of Le Tourneur's translation of the *Night Thoughts*. Such intolerance on the part of the French seemed monstrous. Young, the victim of fate, appeared also to be the victim of fanaticism, and for many a long year English visitors made pilgrimages to the melancholy grotto where this drama had been enacted. Unfortunately for the poet's sincerity, the story is of his own invention. The death of Young's step-daughter did actually occur in France, but at Lyons, as a learned inhabitant of that town has shown, and not at Montpellier; she was buried at the former place, not in a nameless grave, but in the enclosure formerly reserved for Protestants, and not by stealth, but with befitting ceremony. At most it appears that the cost of interment was expensive, and it was this trifling grievance that was dramatically treated by Young.

Here is a Roland for an Oliver. The imputation of insincerity from which the poet's admirers sought to rescue his fame is barbed with the additional charge of stinginess. Young's reputation, however, was not left to suffer long under this double stigma; but in 1901 Professor Thomas propounded a theory scarcely more creditable to the poet: namely, that the daughter was perhaps his illegitimate child.

The principal evidence for this interesting theory is as follows: The early existence of the Montpellerine tradi-

⁹ *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, etc., pp. 305-6. Quoted by H. C. Shelley.

tion, with its circumstantial exactitude of detail;¹⁰ the fact that an early biographer speaks of Narcissa as the poet's daughter;¹¹ an apparently deliberate attempt by Young to deceive Vincenz von Tschärner, a correspondent and friend of his;¹² a suspicious tinkering with his biography on the part of certain titled relatives;¹³ the absence of fifteen parchment pages cut from the Welwyn birth-register and recopied, the recopied pages falling, for the most part, between the years 1730-1740.¹⁴ Taken together, these items wear for M. Thomas a suspicious aspect; they suggest some mystery in the life of the moralizing poet, some scandalous episode that Young would fain keep locked up in the closest of oblivion.

Closely examined, however, this evidence loses much of its probative value. For example, it would have been egregiously silly in Young to make so evident an excision in the parish register as fifteen pages amount to. A single page would have been sufficient; an erasure with the substitution of a fictitious entry would have answered the purpose equally well. But since the register was presumably under the supervision of Young himself, why should he have made or have allowed to be made any entry whatever? Again, the assertion that Young's titled relatives caused certain alterations in his biography, the presumption being that facts discreditable to Young were toned down or omitted, rests upon extremely vague evidence. Interesting as are the reminiscences of Lætitia Hawkins, it must be borne in mind that she was writing of a period long past and that the "pleasantly garrulous old spinster," as De Quincey calls her, was apt to dress her recollections up a bit. Besides, even M. Thomas himself has discovered

¹⁰ *L. c.*, chap. vi, pp. 151-61.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chap. vi, p. 150.

¹² *Ibid.*, chap. vi, pp. 164-7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, chap. vi, pp. 167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. vi, pp. 167-8 and note.

inaccuracies in the early biography of Young,¹⁵ and therefore it need not be surprising if some of Young's influential relatives had sought to present facts in their true light. If there had been any incident in the career of Young such as that which M. Thomas conjectures, it would doubtless have been recorded by some of his early biographers, especially Croft, who had little liking for him. It is too much to suppose that a perfect conspiracy of silence on this point could have been entered into and maintained by all who had occasion to speak of the poet. That M. Thomas's painstaking researches have elicited nothing more definite on this point than the somewhat vague recollections of Miss Hawkins is pretty conclusive evidence that no such incident ever happened.

As for the fact that one of Young's earliest biographers refers to Narcissa as the poet's daughter, one has only to remember the loose usage of the eighteenth century in order to hold that statement suspect. Even as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Temple, whose relationship to the poet was clearly known, was spoken of as Young's daughter-in-law.¹⁶

The early existence of the Montpellerine tradition and the peculiar evasiveness of the poet when questioned directly by Von Tschärner¹⁷ furnish somewhat greater difficulties, but even these are susceptible of a plausible explanation apart from the theory of an illegitimate daughter.

Before examining these points, however, it may be well to quote here an extract from Farquhar's *Sir Harry Wildair*, Act I, Sc. i:

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, chap. I, pp. 6-7, 34, 40.

¹⁶ See *Notes and Queries*, vol. III, 1st Series, p. 422, and vol. IV, pp. 22 and 110, quoted above.

¹⁷ See Thomas, *op. cit.*, chap. VI, pp. 147-8.

Par. And were not you very sorry for the loss of your mistress, Sir Harry's Lady? They say she was a very good woman.

Dicky. Oh! the sweetest woman that ever the sun shined upon. I could almost weep when I think of her.

Par. How did she die, pray? I could never hear how 'twas.

Dicky. Give me a buss then, and I'll tell ye.

Par. You shall have your wages when your work's done.

Dicky. Well then—courage!—now for a doleful tale.—You know that my master took a freak to go to see that foolish Jubilee that made such a noise among us here; and no sooner said than done; away he went, he took his fine French servants to wait on him; and left me, the poor English puppy, to wait upon his lady at home here. Well, so far, so good.—But scarce was my master's back turned, when my lady turned to sighing, and pouting, and whining, and crying; in short fell sick upon't.

Par. Well, well; I know all this already; and that she plucked up her spirits at last, and went to follow him.

Dicky. Very well. Follow him we did, far and far, and farther, than I can tell, till we came to a place called Montpellier, in France; a goodly place, truly.—But Sir Harry was gone to Rome; there was our labor lost.—But, to be short, my poor lady, with the tiresomeness of travelling, fell sick—and died. (*Cries.*)

Par. Poor woman!

Dicky. Ay, but that was not all: here comes the worst of the story. Those cursed barbarous devils, the French, would not let us bury her.

Par. Not bury her!

Dicky. No, she was a heretic woman, and they would not let her corpse be put in their holy ground.—Oh, damn their holy ground for me!

Par. (*aside*) Now had not I better be an honest Pagan, as I am than such a Christian as one of these?—(*Aloud*) But how did you dispose of the body?

Dicky. Why, there was a charitable gentlewoman that used to visit my Lady in her sickness: she contrived the matter so that she had her buried in her own private chapel. This lady and myself carried her out upon our own shoulders through a back-door at the hour of midnight and laid her in a grave that I dug for her with my own hands; without benefit of the clergy.

With this episode now compare the Narcissa episode in *Night III*. In essentials the similarity is strikingly close. Both involve the death of a beautiful young Englishwoman

in a foreign land; both lay stress on the refusal of interment because of religious bigotry; in both a clandestine burial takes place at the hour of midnight; and finally in both the narrator performs the sad rite with his own hand. Such a close parallelism can hardly be a mere accident. There are differences, to be sure, but not in essentials; they are such as would grow naturally out of the manner and method of the poet. His own experience with his step-daughter, Mrs. Temple, whose death from consumption occurred, as we have seen, at Lyons in 1736, doubtless supplied him with some details and furnished the emotional energy necessary to a proper fusing of fiction and fact. The discreet generalizing of the *locale* of the incident as it stands in the poem would be in accordance with this view.

But is there any evidence that Young was familiar with *Sir Harry Wildair*? There is a strong probability, not only that he knew the play, but also that it was recalled to his mind during the composition of the first part of *Night Thoughts*. *Sir Harry Wildair*, the sequel to *The Constant Couple*, from the hero of which it derives its name, was produced in 1701. "Dear Bob" Wilks, to whose care Farquhar left his two daughters, created the role of Sir Harry with such distinction that it became a disputed question with the audience whether the success of the play was not due as much to the actor as to the humor and ingenuity of the author.¹⁸ This same Wilks took part in the first presentation of Young's *Busiris* at Drury Lane in 1719,¹⁹ and in his *Revenge*, which was produced two years later.²⁰

¹⁸ *Dramatic Works of George Farquhar*, ed. A. C. Ewald, p. viii.

¹⁹ H. C. Shelley's *Life and Letters of Edward Young*, chap. III, p. 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. III, p. 51.

In November of 1741 London was all agog over the advent of a new Irish actress at Covent Garden. Says Mrs. Donellan, writing to Elizabeth Robinson (later Mrs. Montague, the queen of the blue-stockings) November 15, 1741:

London is as full now as it used to be in January. Plays are much frequented, both to see Barberini dance, and a new actress from Ireland, her name is Woffington . . . she excels in men's parts, and is to act "Sir Harry Wildair" next Monday, by the king's commands, and all the world goes.²¹

The same correspondent writes again under date of December 1 to say that she and her sister, Mrs. Clayton, had been to two plays in one week:

One of our plays was to see Mrs. Woffington perform the part of "Sir Harry Wildair," and indeed I never saw anything done with more life and spirit.²²

The effect of these letters was to make Mrs. Montague very desirous herself to see the new wonder. Accordingly we find her writing from Whitehall—the town house of the Duchess of Portland—to her sister:

I am going to the play tonight to see Mrs. Woffington act Sir Harry Wildair in the Constant Couple.²³

The letter is undated, as are many of her letters of this period.

Now both Mrs. Donellan and Mrs. Montague were intimate friends of the Duchess of Portland, and to that pleasant circle Young himself had been admitted some time prior to August, 1740.²⁴ He was frequently invited

²¹ Emily J. Climenson, *Elizabeth Montague, 1720-1761*, vol. I, chap. III, p. 92.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²³ *Letters of Mrs. E. R. Montague*, ed. Matthew Montague, Esq., vol. II, p. 169.

²⁴ H. C. Shelley, *op. cit.*, chap. v, p. 116.

to Bulstrode, the country seat of her Grace, whither likewise often repaired Mrs. Donellan, Mrs. Delaney, and her vivacious young friend, Elizabeth Robinson. Writing from Bulstrode in 1741 (no month given) to her sister, Miss Robinson remarks:

The sons of Apollo haunt this place much; the tuneful Green is gone, but the poetical Dr. Young is with us; I am much entertained with him; he is a very sensible man, has a lively imagination, and strikes out very pretty things in conversation.²⁵

Again she writes to the same correspondent: ". . . But Dr. Young came in and entertained my mental faculties 'with a feast of reason and a flow of soul,' till six, and left me a notion or two which I could not digest till tea came in." ²⁶

In another note to the same she has: "The Duchess of Kent and Dr. Young have long left us. You would like Dr. Young; he has nothing of the gall of satire in his conversation." ²⁷ And again:

We expect Mr. and Mrs. West and live in hopes of Dr. Young. He is now at Welwyn, sowing spiritual things in his parish. . . . Sunday se'nnight is the day set for our departure (to London). Oh! then for operas and delight.²⁸

Though this last is undated, it is written from Bulstrode and follows a letter to her mother, which is dated November 6, 1741.

Under date of December 19, 1741, she writes to her mother:

We lost two of our divines today, Dr. Young and the Dean of Exeter . . .

²⁵ *Letters of Mrs. E. R. Montague*, vol. II, pp. 57-58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65. The *Night Thoughts* had not yet been published. Young was known principally for his lively satires.

²⁸ Emily J. Climençon, *Elizabeth Montague*, vol. I, chap. III, p. 90.

That "Peg" Woffington's appearance in the part of Sir Harry Wildair was an event of more than ordinary interest we have the word of Mr. John Fyvie: ²⁹

The standard for acting this character was Wilks, and every actor who had attempted it since him had fallen very far short of success. It was reserved for Mrs. Woffington, says Hitchcock, to exhibit this elegant portrait of the young man of fashion "in a style perhaps beyond the author's warmest ideas." The house was crowded, and she so infinitely surpassed all expectations that her performance was received with a degree of applause beyond anything that had ever been known. *Her Sir Harry Wildair became the subject of conversation in every polite circle*; it was repeated twenty nights during the season, drawing every night a crowded and brilliant audience, and it established her reputation as an actress of the first rank.

Now bearing in mind the fact that both Mrs. Donellan and the future Mrs. Montague had seen "Peg" in the part of Sir Harry, and remembering Young's early connection with Wilks, whose fame in that part had hitherto seemed secure from eclipse; and recollecting his continued interest in the theatre,³⁰ it will—far from seeming improbable—appear most likely that not only were the merits of the two interpretations interestingly discussed by the Bulstrode circle, but likewise the relative excellence of the plays in which Sir Harry appears as the principal character.

Assuming, then, that circumstances had recalled to Young's mind the affecting passage in *Sir Harry Wildair* and that he had procured therefrom hints for the treatment of the Narcissa episode in the *Complaint* (the first title of *Night Thoughts*), his peculiar "reticences renforcées par des mensonges" as M. Thomas views them, become susceptible of ready explication.

²⁹ *Comedy Queens of the Georgian Era*, p. 116.

³⁰ His *Brothers* was not produced until 1750. See H. C. Shelley, *op. cit.*, chap. III, p. 67.

The *mensonges* to which M. Thomas has particular reference, occur in a letter written from London, March 15, 1750-51, to Baron Haller by Vincenz Bernhard von Tschanner, a young Swiss gentleman, who gives what purports to be an exact statement of an explanation he had from Young himself.³¹ In this explanation Young is made to declare that the *Lucia* of the *Night Thoughts* is his wife, the mother of *Narcissa* and sister of the Count of Litchfield; that on her mother's side she was grand-daughter (*petite-fille*) to King Charles II; ³² that *Narcissa* married *Philander*, the son of Lord Palmerston, and that they had both died on a journey to France, undertaken for their health, on which journey they were accompanied by "leur digne Père" (Young). Their deaths were separated by a very short interval.

Young, lui-même, profondément affligé par cette double perte, eut encore au passage de Calais de Douvres une fièvre qui le mit au bord du tombeau. Ces tristes accidents furent l'occasion et le sujet des *Pensées Nocturnes* qu'il composa effectivement dans le silence de ces nuits que l'affliction et les insomnies lui rendirent encore plus noires.

As we have already seen, Mrs. Temple died at Lyons in 1736 and was regularly interred in the foreign cemetery at that place. Her husband, the Philander referred to in the above letter, not only survived her, but married again in England; ³³ although the poem makes the death of Philander precede that of Narcissa.³⁴

If the reader will now turn to the prefatory statement

³¹ See M. Thomas, *op. cit.*, chap. vi, pp. 164-6.

³² This point H. C. Shelley declares has escaped the notice of all of Young's previous biographers, with how much justice the above citation from M. Thomas clearly shows. See the former's *Life of Young*, chap. v, pp. 107-8. The fact is likewise recorded in Mrs. Temple's epitaph.

³³ M. Thomas, *op. cit.*, chap. v, p. 141. Temple died in 1744-5.

³⁴ See *Night Thoughts*, III, ll. 62-63.

at the head of the *Night Thoughts*, he will note that Young declares that the occasion of the poem "was real, not fictitious." That little statement, I believe, furnishes the key to the mystery, assuming, of course, that von Tscharnier is accurately quoting Young. The readers of the *Complaint*, noting the author's rather vague statement with regard to the "real occasion" of the poem, naturally seized upon the most affecting episode in the poem as that embodying the occasion referred to. This episode is indubitably that describing the clandestine burial of the frail and beautiful Narcissa. Now the actual "real occasion" I believe to be the death of Philander, who, as M. Thomas has brilliantly shown, is no other than the poet Thomas Tickell, the intimate friend of both Young and Addison. Tickell, it was, who confided to Young the famous anecdote concerning the manner of Addison's death,³⁵ and it was the recollection of this confidence, I feel certain, that furnished the real inspiration for the *Complaint* as a whole.

Says Young in the essay *Conjectures on Original Composition* (written in the form of a letter to his friend Samuel Richardson, the novelist):

The fact [the death-bed anecdote] is indisputably true, nor are you to rely on me for the truth of it: **My** report is but second edition: **As** clouds before the sun are often beautiful; so, this of which I speak. How finely pathetic are those two lines, which this so solemn and affecting scene inspired:

"He taught us how to live: and oh; too high
A price for knowledge, taught us how to die."

—*Tickell.*

With truth wrapped in darkness, so sung our oracle to the public, but explained himself to me: He was present at his patron's death, and that account of it here given, he gave me before his eyes were dry: *By what means Addison taught us how to die, the poet left to*

³⁵ See Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 2nd Ed., 1759, pp. 107-8.

be made known by a late and less able hand; but one more zealous for his patron's glory.

The italics are mine. The reference, I take it, is to the *Night Thoughts*.

It must not be forgotten that the first four *Nights* made their initial appearance anonymously, the author carefully concealing his name "on purpose to try the force of his poem."³⁶ The first *Night* proved so popular that a second edition was necessary in less than two months. Naturally, with the publication of each successive *Night* the curiosity of the public regarding the authorship of so unusual a poem mounted to a very high pitch; and when, at the appearance of the fourth *Night*, a general preface was added declaring that the occasion of the poem was real, not fictitious, speculation must have been busy indeed. In December, 1743, the fifth *Night* made its appearance, bearing upon its title-page the name of the author. Dr. Young immediately became an object of sympathetic interest. His various bereavements, vaguely known, were brought into harmony with the pathetic incidents narrated in the poem. Mrs. Temple, who, it was remembered, died somewhere in France, became Narcissa; her husband, Henry Temple, was of course Philander; and Lady Young, the mother of Narcissa, was Lucia. Nothing could be clearer.

This seeming basis of fact, with its melancholy suggestion of personal grief, must have had a direct bearing on the sale of the poem; for we find the absence of the poignant personal note from the fifth *Night* freely commented on by even the partial Bulstrode circle.³⁷ Perhaps it was

³⁶ Letter of Benjamin Victor, quoted in Ralph Straus's *Robert Dodsley*, chap. iv, p. 76.

³⁷ "I believe I told you the judgment of this house about the Fifth Night; 'tis not so dark as some of his former, but has not so much

this fact that influenced Dodsley in his negotiations for the copyright of the *Sixth Night*; for we are told that he was at first unwilling to pay the sixty guineas asked.³⁸ At any rate, there seems to be a good deal of truth in George Eliot's statement that "most persons in speaking of 'Night Thoughts' have in their minds only the two or three first Nights; the majority rarely getting beyond these, . . ." the reason being that, "in these earlier nights there is enough genuine sublimity and genuine sadness to bribe us into too favorable a judgment of them as a whole."³⁹

It now becomes evident that there might have been very substantial reasons for the peculiar answer Young is said to have made to von Tschärner. Eleven years had elapsed since the composition of these *Nights* which introduced the characters about whose identity information was then sought. During the interval an explanation had sprung up that had attained the fixity of settled tradition. This explanation was plausible; it interested the public; and it had materially aided in the sale of the poem as a whole. Why then disturb it, particularly since the explanation had some slight element of truth?

merit as his last, though many thoughts and lines in it are charming." Mrs. Delaney to her sister, Mrs. Dewes, Bulstrode, Jan. 4, 1743-4. *Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Delaney*, vol. II, 1st Series p. 243.

"I have an old aunt that visits me sometimes, whose conversation is the perfect counterpart of them [Shenstone's letters]. She shall fetch a long-winded sigh with Dr. Young for a wager; though I see *his* Suspiria are not yet finished. He has *relapsed* into 'Night the Fifth.' I take his case to be wind in great measure, and would advise him to take rhubarb in powder, with a little nutmeg amongst it." W. Shenstone to Mr. Graves, Dec. 23, 1743. *Shenstone's Works* (J. Dodsley, 1791), vol. III, p. 94.

³⁸ R. Straus, *op. cit.*, chap. IV, p. 76.

³⁹ George Eliot: *Worldliness and Other-Worldliness, Complete Works* (St. James Edition), vol. III, pp. 235-6.

Suppose, for a moment, Young had informed his Swiss admirer that Philander was not Henry Temple, his son-in-law, as had been believed, but that he was the poet Tickell, merely a friend; that Narcissa was not entirely drawn from Mrs. Temple, that the latter had been buried in Lyons in conformity with existing regulations, that a stone had been placed over her remains by her husband, who, oh unromantic fact, outlived her and married again; that in reality (assuming my theory to be correct) he had got several hints and suggestions for the Narcissa episode from Dicky's fictitious report in George Farquhar's *Sir Harry Wildair*; what would have been the effect on his own reputation and, consequently, on the sale of the poem? He would forthwith have been charged with insincerity, with feigning a poignancy of grief that the circumstances did not warrant—in short, with tacitly cheating the public into buying his work, although he had merely accepted an interpretation which the public itself had placed upon his poem. The ultimate result would have been the complete alienation of all those who had believed the poem to be the outpouring of a genuine sorrow induced by the pathetic incidents related in the first three *Nights*.

It is true that the explanation here given does little credit to Young in his quality of clergyman. From the point of view of the literary worker, however, his offense would appear comparatively venial. At any rate, the theory seems to me more charitable than that which seeks to father upon him a conjectural illegitimate daughter.

There remains, however, another difficult point. It will be recalled that by the close of the eighteenth century the Montpellier tradition had assumed a verisimilar exactitude of detail impressive in its fullness. It was believed by Eugène Thomas and other French critics of the first half of the nineteenth century, that Le Tourneur, the

translator of Young, who first introduced the poet's works to France, was responsible for the origin of the Montpellier tradition. But as M. Walter Thomas points out,⁴⁰ this tradition had its origin in England, "in the first authentic documents that we possess on the whole life of the poet," the account in the *Biographia Britannica* for 1765, the year of the poet's death. It was from this report that Le Tourneur and most of the later biographers of the poet drew the bulk of their material. "It is certain," the anonymous writer of the *Biographia* sketch declares (I quote from M. Thomas) "that his daughter figures under the poetic name of Narcissa. During the last sickness (of the latter) he took her to Montpellier in France, where she died."

In tracing the later history of this tradition, M. Thomas found that as early as 1787, eighteen years after the appearance of Le Tourneur's translation, the story of Narcissa's clandestine burial had become part of the local history of Montpellier. In 1797, as we have seen,⁴¹ it received detailed notice in the *Evangelical Magazine*, and it was not called in question until about the middle of the nineteenth century. But M. Thomas's indefatigable scrutiny revealed something more; he discovered that no less than three separate versions of the tradition had flourished at Montpellier itself, two of which generously supplied the unfortunate girl with different graves.⁴²

The fact that different versions of the same tradition existed contemporaneously at Montpellier suggests for M. Thomas some basis in actuality, the idea being that the presence of much smoke indicates the certainty of at least a spark of fire. According to this theory, the frequent

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, chap. vi, p. 151.

⁴¹ See summary of Mr. Taylor's letter quoted above from *Notes and Queries*.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, chap. vi, pp. 157-61.

circumstantial references to Young point to an actual visit shortly after the death of his wife, the purpose of the visit being to give the supposititious illegitimate daughter the benefit of the climate.

For the support of this view, M. Thomas confesses his inability to find any direct evidence. There is no record of Young's absence from England at the time conjectured. It is true that in the report of a suit being tried before Chancellor Hardwicke to settle the question of Wharton's annuities to Young there is no definite mention of Young's presence at the trial. On the other hand, we have no proof that he was not there or even that his presence was necessary. In a suit that dragged its sinuous course through a period of twenty-four years,⁴³ it would not be surprising if one of the interested parties should occasionally be absent; nor need this absence imply a sojourn abroad.

In view of the fact, then, that there is no definite evidence of Young's absence from England at the time when the supposed interment is thought to have taken place; that there is no real evidence of any scandal in the life of the poet such as the existence of an illegitimate daughter would indicate; that there is a striking similarity between the Narcissa episode and the imagined burial episode from *Sir Harry Wildair*; and that there is a probability amounting almost to certainty that Young's attention was drawn to the *Wildair* passage at the time when he was composing the first parts of *Night Thoughts*, we are justified, it seems to me, in discarding the theory of an illegitimate daughter and adopting that which sees in the incident an unacknowledged borrowing poetically fused with material from the writer's own experience.

HORACE W. O'CONNOR.

⁴³H. C. Shelley's *Life of Young*, chap. vi, p. 62.